

Relapse

by liveonpurpose

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Summary: Sequel to 'Wiped Out.' Zane is having memory blackouts every few days. How will Rikki deal? What happens when Zane's memory disappears at the worst possible time?

## 1. Just a Blip

Hey guys! This is my sequel for Wiped Out. While you can certainly read this alone, I do recommend reading Wiped Out first so you know everything that's going on. Thanks so much for all of the encouragement, and special thanks to Krystalslazz for giving me that last push I needed to write this. I hope you all enjoy it! Reviews are always appreciated, each one means a lot to me! Also, I am NOT a doctor, or medically inclined in any way. Anything I've written about Zane and his condition has come out of my imagination, so please don't worry about whether or not it's factually correct. I don't know anything about amnesia. :) Feel free to PM me with with any questions or criticism. Peace!

-S.

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><p>Rikki gazed thoughtfully at the delicate ring that encircled the fourth finger on her left hand. It sparkled brightly in the sunlight, reflecting the brilliant blue of the ocean waves from where she sat on the dock. Just over a month had passed since Zane's memory had returned after the accident. Rikki's memories slid back to the incident almost against her will.<p>

Zane had hit his head in a motorbiking accident and had lost his memory, almost losing Rikki in the process. He hadn't remembered her or anything about her, specifically the fact that she was a mermaid. Rikki's pulse picked up as she remembered how she'd almost lost him forever. Somehow, everything had come together in the end. Zane remembered her, and to Rikki's surprise, he had proposed. The last few days had been absolute perfection for the pair.

...Until about a week ago. Rikki's eyebrows knit tightly together as she recalled how it had started. Well, RE-started. She had arrived at Zane's house early in the morning. They'd made plans to go into town together to check out new uniform designs for the cafe. Rikki thought back to how her nightmare had started all over, losing herself in her memories.

Rikki knocked on the door, surprised Zane wasn't waiting for her on the front steps like he usually did. It was exactly 10am, when they had planned to meet. She waited a few seconds, and then pushed the unlocked door open when no one answered it. "Zane?" She called. Zane's father was out of town, as usual. He had a ton of work to catch up on since he'd missed so much after Zane's accident. He was rarely home lately.

Zane didn't answer her call. Rikki walked timidly through the house, looking for her boyfriend. She made her way upstairs and knocked lightly on his bedroom door. "Zane? Are you in there?"

The door wasn't shut tightly and creaked as Rikki pushed it open. There was her boyfriend, sprawled out across his bed. He lay on his stomach, head turned to the side.

"Here you are, sleepy head." Rikki bounced onto the edge of Zane's bed, leaning over him playfully. "Wake up!" She tickled the back of his neck lightly.

Zane gasped and jumped out of the bed quickly, knocking Rikki back into the foot board with a thump. He stood, breathing heavily and staring at Rikki with blank eyes for several seconds. "What are you doing here..." He quickly deflated just slightly, looking around the room with wide eyes. Eventually he paused, closed his eyes tightly, and shook his head hard. When he reopened his eyes they looked more normal. He exhaled, relieved, as they landed on Rikki. "It's you." He breathed.

Zane collapsed into Rikki's arms like a child, curling up in her lap and letting her hold him tightly on the bed.

"Are you ok?" Rikki spoke quietly, trying to hide the amount of panic she'd felt at Zane's slight outburst.

"Rikki, it's you." Zane murmured, his face buried in Rikki's neck.

"Of course it's me." Rikki was growing even more concerned.

Zane pulled his head away from her neck to look her in the eyes. "I was so scared for a minute." He said quietly, sounding completely out of character. "Rikki, just now when I woke up... I didn't know who you were."

Rikki frowned. "You mean..."

"Yeah." Zane buried his face back into Rikki's neck, breathing in the smell of her hair. "It was just like when I had the accident."

"But you know me now." Rikki said slowly.

"It was only for a few seconds." Zane spoke. "One second I thought you were a stranger, and then I knew who you were. It was really scary."

Rikki stroked Zane's hair soothingly, deep in thought. "Did the doctor tell you that might happen?" She asked softly. "I mean, is this something we should be worried about?"

"I feel fine now." Zane said quickly, sitting up. "I'm sorry, I don't know what's gotten into me." He forced his face into a half smile. "I feel much better now." He stood up, climbed off the bed, and walked briskly to his closet to pull out clothes to change into.

Rikki had kept an eye on Zane for the rest of the day, but he seemed normal from then on. At least he had that day. After that first incident only one day passed before it happened again. This time they had been working at the cafe when Zane had an episode.

Zane stood at the blender, making a simple strawberry smoothie for a customer waiting at the counter. Rikki took the boy's money and then turned to Zane, waiting for the drink.

Zane stood at the blender, his eyes suddenly wild. "How did I get here?" He panicked, jamming at the button to make the blender stop screaming. He backed away from the blender as if it were poisonous. "What is all this?" He stared blankly at the carton of strawberries he held in his hands. He dropped it quickly, sending strawberries rolling all over the floor.

"Zane!" Rikki tried to take his hand in hers but he yanked it out of her grasp.

"I don't know you." Zane backed away from her, his eyes wide. He looked around frantically. "Where am I?" His voice became choked. He clumsily pushed his way through the small gate behind the counter and dashed out of the cafe.

"Wait!" Rikki ran after her boyfriend. She found him a mere moment later, sitting on the dock and holding his knees tightly to his chest. "Are you ok?" She said, placing a gentle hand on Zane's back as she sat down beside him.

"No." Was all Zane had said.

The word echoed through Rikki's memory as she sat on the dock. She'd immediately taken Zane to the hospital to be checked out. They didn't know if these memory episodes were normal for a recovering amnesiac, but they didn't want to take the chance on anything serious being wrong. Rikki wasn't allowed to accompany Zane back to the cat scan hall, so she'd excused herself for a bit of fresh air. Now she sat on the dock just up the street from the hospital, looking out over the water and praying her Zane was alright.

Rikki's phone blipped brightly. She quickly flipped it open.

'All done.' The text read. It was from Zane.

Rikki jumped to her feet and hurried back to the hospital.

"Is your father available to speak to, Mr. Bennett?" The nurse asked

Zane as Rikki walked up.

"No, he's away on business." Zane spoke up from the hospital bed. He reached for Rikki's hand as she walked in.

"Zane, I'm afraid your head isn't healing quite as well as we'd hoped it would." The nurse said with a regretful expression. She tacked a few x-rays to the metal railing on the wall. "As you can see, the swelling is down and the blood lines are connected." She pointed.

"Yes, I see that." Zane pushed himself to a sitting position on the bed. "But why is my memory flickering in and out on me?"

The nurse exhaled before beginning to speak. "It's very rare Mr. Bennett, but sometimes when someone experiences a major head injury like yours, the blood vessels in the brain will constrict as it heals. Usually, once the brain heals itself the vessels will relax, allowing an adequate amount of blood to pass through." She pointed to the x-ray. "You're blood vessels didn't do so, I'm afraid. They're still terribly tight. In fact, some of them are almost completely constricted."

"What does that mean?" Rikki spoke up.

"Well," The nurse pursed her lips. "It means you may continue to experience these memory black-outs, Mr. Bennett. I can't say much for sure, everyone reacts differently to the lack of blood flow, but the parts of your brain being deprived of blood are the same parts you injured in the accident, the memory receptors. These memory flashes may never happen again, or they may continue off and on for days, months..."

"Years?" Zane interrupted. His voice echoed through the hospital room.

"There's really no way to tell." The nurse said apologetically. "Since the constricted vessels are in your brain it's incredibly risky to do surgery. It's really best for us to try to wait this out and see if you can't heal yourself."

Zane nodded, deep in thought. It was like reliving his worst nightmare, those brief moments when he couldn't remember anything. It was so terrible, all of a sudden he didn't know who anyone was, or where he was. Then, like waking up, everything would come back. It was a sickening sensation, one he wasn't eager to repeat. "Is there anything we can do to prevent it from happening?" He asked. "Anything I can do to help my blood vessels heal?"

"I'm sorry dear," The nurse smiled regretfully. "But this is something we'll just have to wait out. I'll get your paperwork." She let herself out of the room.

Zane dropped back onto his pillow with a sigh. "I thought this whole mess was over." He exhaled.

"So did I." Rikki stared at her hands. She didn't know what to do with this new information.

Zane turned his face to Rikki's. "I'm scared." He said simply, his

eyes searching for something in hers.

Rikki looked at Zane with surprise. It wasn't like him to be so... so vulnerable. "It's going to be ok." She entwined her fingers in his, squeezing his hand tightly. "If we could make it through the amnesia we can definitely get through a little aftershock here or there."

"Of course we can." Zane gazed up into the face of the girl he loved, the girl he couldn't wait to marry. "Everything will be fine." He said, trying to convince himself. "It has to be."

## 2. Not Alright

Rikki and Zane rode in silence as Rikki drove them back to Zane's place. Neither quite knew what to say to the other. It was Zane who finally broke the silence.

"Well..." He began slowly. "We have nothing to worry about, Rikki. I feel just fine now, I'm sure I won't have anymore memory flickers." His tone didn't quite convince either one of them. He looked to Rikki, letting a few more moments of silence pass, but she stared straight ahead. "Please say something." He pleaded.

"Sorry." Rikki shook herself free of her troubled mind. She forced a smile to her face, though it didn't quite reach her eyes. "Want to stop for dinner? You must be hungry."

"Don't you want to talk about what the doctor told us?" Zane asked timidly.

"What is there to talk about?" Rikki's harsh tone gave her away more than she'd intended. "The doctor said that you may have relapses from time to time. And that you may have them for the rest of your life." She finished blankly.

"Or that it might never happen again!" Zane shot in quickly. "Rikki, I feel fine, really."

"And you felt just fine before each of the times it's happened." Rikki could feel herself beginning to lose her cool, unable to keep her voice from rising higher and higher. "And then you lost your memory all over again. And then I got to relive all those days when you couldn't remember me." Her voice cracked slightly. "It was torture."

"I'm sorry." Zane said quietly.

Rikki laughed bitterly, unable to take her eyes off the road in front of her. "Don't you ever say you're sorry. I mean it. This is not your fault, Zane."

"I know that." Zane fiddled with his watch as he muttered. "I just hate all this. Haven't we been through enough?"

"I was just thinking the same thing." A sad smile lifted the corners of Rikki's mouth. She glanced briefly at Zane before focusing back on the road. She gently steered the car into the driveway of Zane's house. Rikki shut off the engine as she composed her words.

"We have been through enough, Zane." She said firmly. "And we're going to make it through this too. We can make it though anything." She smiled at him as they both climbed out of the car.

They walked to the front door hand-in-hand and taking their time. Once they reached the front door, Rikki pulled Zane towards her and kissed him hard on the lips. A moment later she headed down the walk towards her own home. Zane watched her go, breathless with the memory of her lips against his. He watched her until she had completely disappeared from view before hurrying inside. He dashed upstairs and threw open the middle drawer of the large oak desk that sat in the study. He pulled a plain white notebook from the drawer and hastily he began to write. And he didn't stop for a long time.

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><p>Rikki opened the cafe the next morning as usual. She hadn't gotten much sleep the night before, but she did her best to convince herself that everything was going to be just fine. She checked her watch constantly. trying not to worry about why Zane was so late for his shift. "He'll be here soon." She told herself.<p>

The cafe was bustling with the afternoon lunch rush by the time Zane hurried inside.

"Sorry I'm late." His lips brushed her cheek as he busted down towards his office. "I didn't hear my alarm this morning." He smiled brightly at Rikki, winking at her before pulling the office door closed behind him.

Once inside, and out of Rikki's sight, he immediately sagged. He rubbed his temples so hard his fingers went white as he dropped to lay on the couch. Zane swallowed hard, trying not to feel too guilty. He had lied to Rikki, and he felt terrible about it. The truth was that he had not slept through his alarm that morning. It had woken him up at 7:30AM, just like it was supposed to. And then Zane had shut it off and gone right back to sleep.

He had had absolutely no idea why the alarm was going off. No idea where he was supposed to be at that hour of the morning. Not the slightest recollection of Rikki's Cafe, or of having to work that morning, or anything. Three hours later, Zane had shot out of bed, cursing when he saw the time. He'd gotten dressed as fast as he could before running out the door towards the Cafe. Deep down, Zane was unnerved by the spell of memory loss he'd experienced, but he was determined not to let Rikki worry about it. He didn't want to be the cause of any more stress.

A knock at the door made Zane sit up immediately, pretending to be looking for something on the table in front of him. "Come in." He called casually.

Rikki cautiously poked her head inside. "Hey..."

"Rikki, you know you don't need to knock." Zane was secretly glad she had, as it had given him time to compose himself. "It is our office."

"I know..." Rikki gingerly sat next to him on the couch. She looked

at him with concerned eyes. "Are you alright? Did anything happen last night after I dropped you off?"

"Of course not." Zane shrugged casually, his voice only slightly higher than usual. "Why would you think that?"

"I don't know." Rikki looked at him hard, her brow furrowing slightly. "I just worry about you, that's all."

"Well you have nothing to worry about." Zane pecked Rikki's lips lightly as he stood to walk over to his desk. "I'm completely fine."

"Good to hear." Rikki smiled, relieved, as she stood as well. "Did you put in the fruit order?"

"Sorry, I forgot." Zane froze, looking up guiltily. He quickly reassured her. "I just forgot, I didn't have a memory flip out or anything. Don't stress."

"I won't." Rikki opened the office door. "But we'll run out of strawberries unless you put that order through today."

"Yes ma'am." Zane saluted her, then watched until she was gone. It was only then that he resumed rubbing the temples of his throbbing head.

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><p>"Hey Rikki." Bella called behind the counter as the band set up for their practice later that afternoon. She leaned over so that only Rikki could hear her. "So... Cleo and I were thinking about taking a swim out to Mako later. No boys allowed." She grinned. "Are you in?"<p>

"You know, that sounds like exactly what I need, actually." Rikki smiled back before getting back to work. A relaxing swim with the girls sounded like the perfect way to get her mind off things. It also sounded like the perfect opportunity to get their opinions on the situation.

"See you at 7!" Bella winked before joining Nate and the rest of the band on stage.

The hours passed quickly. Zane shortly returned to his normal self and Rikki worked hard until she could finally go.

"You sure you got this?" She asked as she took off her apron.

"Absolutely." Zane calmly started the blender. "It's not even that busy in here. Go on, get out of here."

"Ok..." Rikki said reluctantly. "I'll have my phone at the moon pool, call me if you need anything."

"\_Ok.\_" Zane gave her a gentle push. "Now go have fun with the girls."

Rikki didn't need to be told twice. After a quick glance from side to

side to see if anyone was looking, she leapt off the dock and into the water.

Swimming was perfect, just the right amount of relaxation after a hard couple of days. Rikki took her time getting to the old island, swimming lazily through the saltwater. Eventually she surfaced in the Moon Pool.

"Well look who \_finally\_ made it." Cleo teased. "We thought you'd never get here."

"Sorry, I just didn't feel like rushing anywhere." Rikki shrugged. She quickly pulled herself out of the water and dried herself, steaming the water off in a matter of seconds. Once standing, she reached into her pocket and set her cell phone carefully on the sand before jumping back into the water. "I told Zane to call if he needed anything." She explained.

"Speaking of Zane..." Bella raised her eyebrows, waiting for Rikki to fill them all in.

Rikki didn't need any more encouragement. She told them about all the events of the last few days, including her worries for the future. Her friends listened closely, listening thoughtfully as she unloaded.

"So do I just wait it out?" Rikki finished. "It's the worst feeling in the world, I can't go through the whole thing again."

"No you can't." Cleo quietly agreed. She reached out a reassuring hand to Rikki's shoulder. "Rikki, we all watched you go through it. You were pale, sick withdrawn... no. You can't put yourself through anything like that again."

"But it may not be a problem anymore." Bella piped in, shooting Cleo a look. "Look, one or two flashes here and there is hardly anything to break up about, right? Rikki, you \_love \_him."

"I know!" Rikki ducked under the water in frustration. She took a few moments of cool silence to herself before resurfacing. "I'm sorry. Thank you both for your input. You're both absolutely right. I just don't know what to do about it."

"Look," Cleo spoke to her friend gently. "When Lewis and I broke up, it was the worst feeling in the world, and we'd only been dating for a few weeks. You and Zane have been together for \_years.\_ I just don't want to see you get hurt."

"I know." Rikki took a deep breath. "I'm sure everything will be just fine."

With a shrill bell, Rikki's phone rang loudly into the sand. The three girls froze momentarily as they looked at it.

"It's nothing." Rikki said lightly, though her hand shook as she reached for the phone. "I'm sure it's nothing."

There was an echoey silence in the cavern as Rikki held the phone to her ear. "H- hello?" Her face instantly melted into a relieved smile. "Hey Zane, what's up?" She listed for a few moments. "That sounds

great, I'll be home in a few minutes. Meet me there in an hour?" She hung up the phone.

"He's taking me for a boat ride later tonight." She announced, smiling. "And everything has gone smoothly today, no memory blips."

"See?" Bella said happily. "I told you it would all turn out alright."

Rikki smiled back before ducking under the water and swimming quickly back towards shore. She ran into her house and quickly threw on a blue dress, straightened her hair until it shone under the lights, sprayed on just a touch of Zane's favorite perfume, and popped in a pair of Sapphire earrings Zane had given her for her birthday. She checked the time on her phone as she applied a bit of coral lipstick. Zane should be at her house to pick her up any minute now.

Rikki checked out the window for Zane's familiar silver car, but there was nothing in her driveway yet. A few minutes later she checked again, only to be disappointed all over again.

Twenty minutes later she finally dialed his phone number.

"Yes?" His voice came over the line.

"Uh, Zane?" Rikki was taken aback by the coolness of his tone.

"That's who you called, isn't it?" Zane shot back.

This time there was no mistaking it, something was wrong with the way he sounded. "Where are you, Zane?" She asked, quickly becoming nervous.

"Down at the docks, where else would I be?" Zane hung up the phone.

Rikki didn't hesitate for a moment. She dashed out the door and ran for the docks. Maybe Zane was really fine. Maybe she'd misunderstood when he said he'd pick her up at her house? He could be totally fine. Zane had always had a short temper, maybe he was just in an ill mood.

Rikki reached the docks after nearly a mile of running. She gasped for air as she paused to look for Zane's boat. She located it quickly and dashed to it, resting on the side of it. "Zane?" She panted. "Are you here?"

It soon became apparent that Zane was not on the boat. In fact, Rikki couldn't seem to find him anywhere. The pounding of loud music from a boat further down the line distracted her. Maybe Zane had gotten bored waiting for her and had wandered down there?

A crowd of young people were partying on a large white boat that Rikki recognized from the marina. It was still docked, but definitely had a raging party onboard.

"Hey pretty thing." A completely wasted frat boy leaned over the edge of the boat. "What are you waiting for? Come on up."

Rikki tried to phone Zane again, listening hard for his familiar ring. To her surprise, it rang loudly from only a few feet away.

"Don't you want to answer that?" A female voice giggled from nearby.

"Now? Hell no." Zane was standing with his back to Rikki. He had his arms wrapped around a trashy looking blonde girl who was obviously wasted. "I have better things to do." He leaned in and kissed the girl's ear.

"Zane man, I thought you were just going to get us a couple beers... oh..." Nate dashed around the corner, stopping short when he saw Rikki. His eyes then darted to Zane and the girl he was now making out with. "Hey, Rikki, I'm sorry, I just asked him to keep me company at my cousins party, I swear." Nate promised, looking genuinely surprised by Zane's behaviour.

Rikki felt like her world was crashing down around her where she stood. She turned and ran, not sure quite where she was going. Bella had been completely wrong. Things were not going to turn out alright.

### 3. The Break

Rikki couldn't sleep that night. In fact, she couldn't seem to do much of anything at all. She felt totally numb. Every time she closed her eyes all she could see was Zane kissing the girl out on the docks. Rikki wanted to cry, to punch walls and scream at the top of her lungs, but she couldn't seem to feel a thing.

"It was just his memory. This isn't his fault." She repeated in her head. No matter how hard she tried, she couldn't manage to make herself believe it. This had been way more than just a blip. Before, the memory lapses had only lasted a few seconds. This one must have lasted at least an hour. Rikki didn't know when he'd finally snapped out of it. Or if he'd ever snapped out of it. The thought made Rikki's stomach churn. She felt sick.

Unable to be still any longer, she stood and ran outside down to the shore. She dove out into the dark water, swimming far, far away.

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><p>Zane opened his eyes and stared up at the unfamiliar ceiling above him. The morning sun streamed in through the window, brightly lighting up the room. It took a few seconds for Zane to realize where he was. He was in the guest bedroom at his friend Nate's house. But why was he there? He hadn't had any plans to hang out with Nate last night. He was supposed to have been with Rikki...<p>

Slowly, like trickling water, Zane's memories of the night before began to return.

Nate knocked lightly on the door before popping his head inside. "Hey man, you up?"

"Nate..." Zane's voice was hollow, empty. He was sitting on the bed, looking at the wall in front of him with unseeing eyes. Slowly, he turned to face his friend. "Nate, I've really messed up." He spoke barely loud enough to be heard.

Nate awkwardly shoved his hands into his pockets. "You were acting pretty weird last night, buddy."

"I kissed someone." To his embarrassment, tears stung at Zane's eyes as he remembered. For the first time, Zane wished he could forget everything...

He had been in his car on the way to pick up Rikki when he decided to swing by the docks to turn the heating system in his boat on so that it would be toasty warm when he got back with Rikki. He'd pulled in, parked, and gotten out of the car. Instantly, his mind had blanked out. He had had no idea why he was standing in the boat yard in the middle of the night. Then, in the distance, he'd heard the music from the party. He'd been about to get back into his car and drive home when he'd bumped into Nate, who had just gotten there. Nate had asked him to join him at his cousin's party, and Zane had been all too happy to oblige him. In fact, he'd had a blast. Zane had been glad to hit the party with Nate. They were just two single guys having a bit to drink and hitting on girls.

Except Zane wasn't single, not really. He was engaged to the girl of his dreams. He couldn't believe he'd let this happen, but at the same time he didn't know how he could have prevented it. He hadn't felt like he was cheating on Rikki. He hadn't remembered her at all. Zane felt sick, like he might throw up.

"I've got to get to Rikki." Zane jumped out of the bed and quickly began tying his shoes.

"I don't know if you really want to do that, mate." Nate kicked his sneakers nervously as he muttered.

"No, I've got to tell her what happened. She needs to hear it from me." Zane pushed past Nate and started down the steps.

"She already knows." Nate called after him.

Suddenly Zane couldn't move a muscle. "What?" He managed to turn to face Nate.

"I'm sorry, man." Nate said quietly. "You were only out of my sight for a second, I swear I didn't know you were having one of those memory freak out things. I thought we were just having fun."

"How... does Rikki know?" Zane spoke in monotone, barely able to choke it out.

"She was there." Nate couldn't meet Zane's eye. "She saw you with that girl you were making out with. And then she... well, she took off."

"She was there." Zane echoed, suddenly feeling completely broken. He had planned on telling her everything that had happened, but knowing that she had seen it made him sick to his stomach.

"I'm sorry." Nate sounded like he really meant the words. He looked at Zane with apologetic eyes.

Zane couldn't say another word. He didn't see anything as he ran, he only felt the wind on his face. He tried to call Rikki, but it rang through to voice mail every time.

She wasn't at her home. Neither Bella nor Cleo knew where she was, or they weren't telling him. But Zane knew. He knew exactly where Rikki had gone.

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><p>Rikki closed her eyes, silently praying for strength as she heard the footsteps echoing into the cave. She'd known it would only be a matter of time before he found her, she just hoped to be strong enough to do what she needed to do.<p>

Rikki had been there for hours, floating in the pool at Mako Island.

"Zane." Was a she said in greeting. She'd known it was him the second she'd heard the running footsteps.

"Rikki..." Zane dashed inside, sliding onto his stomach so that his face was inches from Rikki's. "I've got to talk to you." He reached for Rikki's hand but she quickly pulled away, swimming to the far end of the pool.

Zane pleaded with Rikki with his eyes. "I love you, Rikki." He said hoarsely. "Listen, last night I made a horrible mistake-"

"Stop." Rikki held up one hand, hoping he'd stop talking.

"No. You've got to listen to me." Zane cried desperately. "Something terrible happened to me-"

"I said STOP!" Rikki yelled, completely losing her composure. Her hands were trembling as she held them up. Her voice became a shaky whisper. "Please. Don't say another word."

Zane reluctantly obeyed, but kept one hand extended towards Rikki, who was far from his reach.

"I can't do this, Zane." Rikki spoke softly. "I'm not strong enough."

"But I-" Zane began, but stopped talking as Rikki's hand gestured for him to be quiet.

"Please." She said, her voice unsteady. "I need to say this and I need to say it now."

Zane closed his mouth, feeling as if he was watching his life fall away. He couldn't stop it, he couldn't say anything. All he could do was wait for Rikki to start talking.

"This isn't your fault." Rikki said, trying to keep the tears out of her voice. "I know that. And I don't blame you." She swallowed. "I need you to know that."

"It is my fault." Zane choked.

"No, it \_isn't\_." Rikki spoke as firmly as she could. "Zane, I love you. I always will. It's important that you know that."

"Rikki..." Zane said nervously, trying to reach out to her.  
"Please."

"It isn't your fault." Rikki repeated, keeping her eyes on the water in front of her. "But it isn't mine either." She took a moment to herself, breathing hard. "This isn't my fault."

Several seconds of dead silence passed. The two locked eyes, but the only sound was that of the gentle waves lapping onto the edge of the pool.

"We need to end this, Zane." Rikki said softly. "I can't do this."

"No." Zane pulled himself into the water, paddling over to where Rikki was treading water. "You \_can't\_ leave me. I love you. I want to marry you."

"Until your memory flips out again." Rikki said coolly. "I can't go through that again."

Slowly, Rikki reached a hand out to Zane. He eagerly extended his own arm, taking her hand in his.

Rikki opened her hand, which now resided between Zane's own hands. Inside her clenched fist was a glittering diamond ring. Her engagement ring.

"You need to take this back." She choked out, trying not to completely lose it.

"No." Zane gasped hoarsely. "No, Rikki. Please."

"Take it." Rikki sounded a bit more steady, but she was still on the verge of falling apart. "Right now."

Zane tried, but he physically could not make himself reach for the ring. He saw it there, sparkling, but he could not take it from her. Rikki waited a few more seconds, then turned her hand over, dropping the ring into the sea below. It sank to the bottom of the sandy bed, sending flashes of light into the water the whole time it sank down.

"I'm sorry." Rikki whispered, her eyes filled with tears. She looked at Zane, at the boy she loved, for a long time. Then, quickly, she ducked under the waves and disappeared.

"Rikki, no." Zane whispered after her. "I love you."

#### 4. Later

Rikki didn't know where to go. She swam and swam, trying not to think. Eventually she changed course, heading to the only place she

could stand to be right now.

"Rikki?" Cleo was surprised to see her friend standing on her front step. Surprise quickly changed to worry as she took in the expression on her best friend's face. "What's wrong?"

Without hesitation, Rikki threw herself into Cleo's arms. Usually, Rikki had no problem being strong and independent, but right now she just wanted to be held.

An hour later, Rikki and Cleo were sitting on Cleo's bed going around and around the same discussion.

"I just can't do this." Rikki said quietly, twisting her engagement ring around her finger.

"I can't believe Zane kissed someone." Cleo shook her head. "You were right to end things, Rikki."

"That's not why I did it though." Rikki swallowed hard. "It isn't his fault that he kissed that girl, he didn't know what he was doing."

"Fair enough." Cleo conceded reluctantly.

"I didn't end things because of him." Rikki met Cleo's eyes. "I ended it because of me. I just can't be with him and always be worrying about the next time he's going to lose his memory. We can't have a relationship that way, it'll never work. This time it was a kiss. What could happen next time he forgets?"

"And what will you do about the cafe?" Cleo asked gently.

"I'm going to turn in my two weeks notice tomorrow." Rikki's voice caught in her throat as she spoke. "I think it's best if I stay away from there for a while."

"I think you're making the right decision." Cleo put an arm around Rikki, pulling her in close to her.

"Then why do I hurt so much?" Rikki hugged Cleo back, wishing she could just disappear for a while.

\* \* \*

><p>Zane couldn't sit still. He jumped up and paced back and forth, trying to compose himself. He picked up his phone and dialed Rikki's number for what felt like the millionth time. As it had all day, it went straight through to voicemail.<p>

"Rikki, please talk to me." Zane pleaded, just hoping she would listen to the message. "Please, I'll do anything... Just talk to me."

He threw his phone down onto the bed before walking into the bathroom. Zane leaned over the sink, splashing cool water onto his face. He knew he needed to stop in at the cafe today, but at the moment he just didn't care if it closed for good, he just wanted to make things right with Rikki.

Hours went by, but Rikki didn't return his calls. Zane angrily grabbed his keys and took off towards the cafe, unable to stay inside his house any longer.

\* \* \*

><p>"One banana strawberry, one pineapple breeze." Rikki announced as she pushed the two smoothies across the counter towards the girls who had ordered them.<p>

"Um, Rikki, get ready." Bella leaned over the bar and spoke quietly. She nodded towards the front entrance.

Zane had just walked inside, looking at Rikki intensely for a moment before practically running over to her.

"Thanks for the heads up." Rikki muttered to Bella.

"Rikki, I am so glad you're here." Zane panted. "I've been trying to get ahold of you all day..."

"I haven't been checking my calls." Rikki said, not looking at him as she straightened the till.

"Can we talk? Please? You have to let me explain myself." Zane said quickly.

"We do need to talk." Rikki spoke, trying to keep her voice from wavering. "In the office?"

"Great." Zane exhaled, relieved, before hurrying down the short hallway.

"You ready for this?" Bella nudged Rikki's arm.

"Not really." Rikki said wryly. "But I can do it." She managed a slim, sad, grin towards Bella before walking into the office that she and Zane had shared since the cafe had opened. She pulled the door closed behind her with a loud click.

"Rikki..." Zane embraced her, holding her close to him. It took a few seconds for him to realize that she wasn't wrapping her arms around him in return. He stepped back, looking at her.

"Nothing has changed, Zane." Rikki said quickly, as firmly as she could manage. She held out a white envelope towards him. "This is my two weeks notice."

"You're quitting the cafe?" Zane took the envelope from her, trying not to show how shocked he was. He'd expected Rikki to reconsider the break up after she had a little time to calm down. "You can't quit, it's ours."

"Well now it's yours." Rikki kept her voice free from emotion as she looked Zane dead in the eyes. Without another word, Rikki turned and marched out of the cafe. She breathed in the warm air, fighting to keep control of herself, and then she dove out into the water. It took superhuman strength, but she didn't look back. She'd made her decision, and she wasn't going to prolong things by letting herself second guess her choice.

The next two weeks passed by at a snail's pace. Zane tried. In fact, he didn't know how he could have tried any harder. He called Rikki no less than twenty times a day, but she never answered him. Zane spent more than one night sitting on Rikki's front porch, hoping for her to come outside, but she never appeared. He was at a loss, he had no idea what to do, but he knew one thing for sure. He wasn't going to give up.

\* \* \*

><p>"Yes, I'd like to block that number." Rikki spoke into her cell phone. "Yes, from both calls and texts."<p>

Cleo watched from where she sat on her bed, sympathetic as Rikki hung up.

"There." Rikki tossed the phone away. "That's done."

"Are you ok?" Cleo tried to sound casual as she flipped through a magazine.

"Yes." Rikki said firmly, picking up a hairbrush and working it through her tangled hair. "There's no point in feeling sorry for myself. This was my decision, and it was the right one for me to make. I can't handle worrying about his memory for the rest of my life, it isn't fair to either of us. I just can't do it." She forced a smile at Cleo, though it looked more like a grimace. "Zane and I are over"

\* \* \*

><p><strong>FOUR YEARS LATER...<strong>

"Thanks, Kate." Rikki looked up from her computer long enough to smile at the office secretary. "I'll be heading out for lunch around noon, will you let Perri know?"

"Of course, Rikki." Kate hurried back towards the front of the office.

Rikki leaned back in her desk chair, taking a proud moment to look around her office. Her office. It had taken a lot of hard work, but she'd managed to land a perfect job.

It was a small event planning business, but she was good at it and more and more clients were hiring her for their special occasions. Perri was the boss, with Rikki ranked just below her. It was everything she'd ever wanted in a job and she loved it.

Rikki packed up her bag at the end of the day, satisfied with another full day of work. It was a short drive home, and she quickly let herself into the apartment she shared with Bella and Cleo.

"Hello lady." Cleo sang playfully as Rikki dropped onto the couch. "And how was your day?"

"Oh, it was just..." Rikki froze, her eyes locked on the hand that Cleo was casually holding out towards her. "Oh my god. What is that?"

"Lewis proposed!" Cleo squealed, dissolving into giggles as she waved her hand in the air.

Rikki hugged Cleo tightly, laughing and jumping as they celebrated. "This calls for a proper night out." She said with a grin. "Get dressed, future Mrs. McCartney."

"Mrs. McCartney!" Cleo yelled, clapping her hands excitedly.

"Where's Bella? I didn't see her car when I pulled in." Rikki pulled a bottle of wine and a corkscrew from the kitchen cabinet.

"She's out swimming with Will." Cleo said absently. "She'll be back before too long."

"So where should we go to celebrate?" Rikki pulled her hair out of its tight bun and shook it out as she spoke.

"Let's go to the Loft, it's my favorite." Cleo couldn't stop smiling.

"Then that's where we're going." Rikki hugged her friend tightly.

Nine o'clock that night found Rikki, Bella, and Cleo arriving outside the hippest club in town, the Loft.

"I'll get the first drinks." Rikki winked at her friends before heading up towards the bar. It was already crowded with people but she managed to push her way through to place her group's order.

"Hey, you're Rikki Chadwick, right?" A young man leaned on the bar beside her.

"Guilty as charged." Rikki smiled awkwardly at the shaggy blonde guy. He was cute in a conventional sort of way, with wavy hair and bright blue eyes.

"I remember you from my Aunt's wedding." He smiled at her and leaned in a little closer. "You were totally on top of it, it was a great ceremony."

"Thanks...ah..." Rikki struggled to place a name with the face. "Adam?"

"Aaron." He held out a hand for her to shake, which she did.

"Sorry, Aaron." Rikki corrected herself.

"I've got this round, don't worry about it." Aaron winked at Rikki as he pushed the money across the bar, then turned to head back to his friends.

\* \* \*

><p>"Thanks, Rikki." Bella said as she took her cocktail from Rikki.<p>

"Don't thank me. Thank him." Rikki nodded across the bar towards Aaron. "He picked it up."

"Oooh, he's cute." Bella checked him out, a mischievous look on her face. "You should give him your card or something, Rikki."

"Maybe." Rikki shrugged as she took a sip of her margarita.

"Maybe, maybe, maybe." Cleo nudged Rikki's arm. "That's what you always say."

"No, sometimes I just say no. Want to dance?" Rikki started to head towards the dance floor but Bella stopped her.

"Come on, Rikki. You have to give people a chance. You always turn them down eventually." Bella said quietly.

"So?" Rikki didn't meet her friends' eyes.

"So go give that cutie your number!" Bella attempted to push Rikki back up towards the bar.

"I said maybe, alright?" Rikki pulled away from Bella. "Stop trying to force me."

"Rikki..." Cleo's tone was gentle. "You've got to date again."

"Cleo, I love you dearly." Rikki gave her a tight-lipped smile. "But you've just gotten engaged. Don't tell me what I've got to do." Her tone wasn't angry, but it was unmistakably serious.

"That's right! Cleo is engaged!" Bella quickly changed the subject, taking the focus off of Rikki. "Let's dance!"

The girls celebrated until late into the night, dancing and drinking as the music booked throughout the club until they were both tired and tipsy. Well, Bella and Rikki were tipsy. Cleo had passed tipsy long ago.

"Oops, sorry!" Cleo giggled as she lost her balance for the third time, leaning heavily on Rikki.

"Alright, Cleo dear, I think it's time we get you home to bed." Rikki laughed.

"Don't call me Cleo anymore." Cleo draped an arm around Rikki's shoulders. "From now on I will only answer to Mrs. McCartney."

"You got it, Mrs. M." Rikki guided her friend through the crowd of dancing people and towards the exit.

"Lewis will be here in two minutes." Bella joined them at the door, slipping her phone back into her pocket. "He said he'd meet us at the corner."

"Thanks for calling." Rikki was now supporting most of Cleo's weight. Cleo was trying to sing to the song blaring over the speakers and dance with Rikki, but wasn't succeeding at either.

Between Rikki and Bella they managed to work Cleo through the crowd and out the exit onto the street.

"There he is." Rikki nodded towards Lewis's familiar sedan, which was just parking up the road.

"Thanks for keeping an eye on her tonight." Lewis scooped Cleo into his arms. "I'm going to take her to my place tonight. You know, so that we can do our own \_celebrating\_ tomorrow morning." He winked at Rikki and Bella.

"Ew, Lewis, gross." Bella swatted his arm.

"Hop in, I'll take you two home first." Lewis's breath caught in his throat as Cleo began nibbling at his neck.

"I... think... we'll just let you two get straight home." Rikki couldn't help but laugh at her friends. If there had ever been two people destined to be together it was Cleo and Lewis. "Thanks Lewis, but we'll just walk it."

"Ok, if you're sure." Lewis buckled Cleo in and shut the door. He blushed as Cleo told him to hurry and get her home to bed.

"We're sure, now get out of here." Bella laughed.

Lewis sheepishly waved goodbye before sliding into the driver's seat.

"Well, Lewis is in for an exciting evening." Rikki joked as the two girls began the short walk to their apartment.

They walked along, sharing stories and laughing with one another. Bella was in the middle of telling Rikki about something that had happened at work when she realized that Rikki had stopped walking. Rikki stood, frozen, staring across the street. Bella immediately knew exactly why she'd stopped.

"Rikki, I'm sorry, we should have walked home a different way." Bella reached for Rikki's hand, squeezing it tightly in hers.

"It's fine." Rikki quickly brushed a tear from her eye before it could fall. "I just haven't seen it since it closed."

The two girls looked up at what had once been Rikki's Cafe. Rikki had heard about it going out of business. The small cafe she'd shared with Zane had been closed for nearly a year now. Slowly, Rikki walked across the street and pressed her face against the glass of the front window. No other company had bought the property, so the interior had been preserved exactly as Zane had left it. The cups, menus, and decorations had been packed away, but Rikki found herself picturing the cafe the way it had started out, full of people and bustling.

"Rikki?" Bella said quietly.

"Hm?" Rikki immediately snapped out of her memories. "Oh, sorry Bells." She realized she'd been standing in silence for a while now. "Let's get on home." She began a brisk pace down the road, with Bella

following close behind. This was not the time to dwell on the past.

## 5. Happy Accidents

Rikki slept in the next morning, enjoying the rays of Saturday sun that streamed in through her window. She allowed herself a long stretch before she stood up out of bed, sure that that would be a day devoted to relaxing.

Bella and Will were sitting at the kitchen table when she finally made her way down the steps.

"And what are you two up to today?" Rikki asked as she poured herself a mug of coffee.

"Actually," Bella stood, a look of masked anticipation on her face. "I've got a gig tonight."

"Really?" Rikki raised her eyebrows behind her mug. "Bells, that's seriously awesome."

Though the cafe had closed, Bella's small band had stayed together. They'd gotten steady work for a while, but then a dry spell had hit. They still practiced when they could find the time, usually working around Lewis's schedule the most. This would be their first paying performance in months.

"Where are you playing?" Rikki took a seat next to Will at the table.

"At that little bar downtown." Bella couldn't hide her excitement as she threw an arm around Will's shoulders. "And it's all thanks to this man."

"No, it's because you're crazy talented." Will grinned as he pecked Bella's cheek before turning towards Rikki. "One of the kids on my junior diving league has an uncle who owns the place." He shrugged.

"Nice job, coach." Rikki ruffled his hair playfully. "What time should we get there?"

"Seven." Bella said brightly as she tucked her music into a folder. "I'm going to head over in about an hour, we have a lot of practicing to do."

"You guys will be fine." Rikki said lightly. "I can't wait."

"That makes two of us!" Bella stood, giving Will a quick hug before hurrying up the stairs to get ready.

"Three of us." Will stood as he finished the last of his coffee. "She's going to do great, she always does."

"Oh, I know it." Rikki flicked absently through the newspaper, taking note of a wedding announcement she should contact.

Will examined Rikki out of the corner of his eye, composing his words

carefully before speaking. "So... I bumped into Zane yesterday." Will kept his tone casual as he looked into his empty coffee cup.

"Did you?" Rikki's voice was even, though a certain tightness could be heard in it.

"Yeah... he was buying some parts for his boat. I was buying a new set of flippers." Will let himself relax slightly. "You know, he... wanted to know how you've been doing."

"Ok." Rikki clenched her jaw, determined not to show any interest.

Will seemed to take her comment as a green light to continue. "I told him you were doing great, and he asked if you were seeing anyone so I said no you weren't-"

"Will..." Rikki's voice automatically commanded his attention. "Please. Just stop."

Will's jaw immediately clamped shut. He stood, carrying his mug to the sink quickly. "Sorry." He said quietly before heading up the stairs to Bella's room.

Rikki let out a long sigh, dropping her head into her hands. She was mad at herself for snapping at her friend, Will hadn't done anything wrong. She had had one rule these last four years, and it was not to be broken. She didn't want to hear Zane's name. She didn't want to know what he was doing or who he was doing it with. She pretended Zane Bennett had never existed, and that was what allowed her to make it through the day without breaking down. She was over him. She didn't think about him. She was over him...

Repeating the words to herself in her head, Rikki placed her own coffee mug in the sink and headed out of the house for the day.

The afternoon passed by quickly. Rikki spent most of it helping Cleo volunteer at the dolphin park, feeding dolphins and handing out flyers. Before the girls knew it, it was time to get home to get ready for the band's show.

The club was reasonably full by the time Rikki, Cleo, and Will arrived at the doors. They could see Bella, Lewis, and Nate setting up their equipment on a small stage across the bar.

"Hey, there's an open spot this way." Will gestured for the girls to follow him to a clear spot at the bar.

"Good eye." Cleo shouted over the music blaring from the speakers.

"Hey guys." The bartender made his way towards them. "What'll it be?"

The three placed their drink order, then turned to survey the club.

"Not a bad turnout." Rikki observed.

The music cut out as Bella stood up at the microphone. "Good evening,

everybody!" She called out enthusiastically.

"Come on, let's get a place close to the stage." Cleo grabbed Rikki's hand and pulled her out onto the floor, followed closely by Will.

The band launched into their first number, an upbeat tune Rikki had heard Bella practicing at home. In no time at all, Rikki, Cleo, and Will found themselves dancing along with the rest of the crowd.

"Want to dance?" A hand belonging to a young man in a blue polo tapped Cleo on the shoulder.

"Aw, I'm sorry but no." Cleo held up her left hand. "I can't, I'm engaged. Actually, I'm engaged to him, see that guy up there playing the drums? That's my fiancÃ©e."

Rikki turned her head, hiding her grin as Cleo gushed to the poor guy.

"Sorry..." The same young man switched his dazzling smile from Cleo to Rikki. "Would you like to dance?"

"I'm sorry, but no." Rikki smiled apologetically. "I'm... not available."

The girls were approached several times over the next hour by young men looking to buy them drinks or dance with them, but they were politely rejected each time.

Cleo swatted Rikki's arm as a particularly handsome guy was turned away. "Are you nuts? He's so cute!"

"Not my type." Rikki shrugged before turning back to face the stage.

Not a minute had passed before Rikki felt yet another tap at her shoulder. "Sorry, but I'm not interes..." She turned, automatically expecting the tap to belong to someone else trying to dance with her.

Zane stood just behind her, looking even more gorgeous than ever. He slowly lowered his hand, his eyes never leaving Rikki's.

"Zane..." Rikki breathed, frozen in surprise.

"Hey." He said quietly, sounding equally as breathless.

A million memories flooded through Rikki's head at once, making her feel unsteady on her feet for a moment. Zane, his proposal, being with him, their fingers entwined, it felt like Rikki had been punched in the stomach as the memories resurfaced. She'd spent so long trying to forget him, it seemed it had all been for nothing. She remembered him now better than ever.

Rikki swallowed hard, trying her best to stay calm and collected. "It's, ah... it's been a long time." She managed a tight smile.

"Yes it has." Zane couldn't look away. "Sorry to startle you, Will

mentioned you'd be here tonight."

Rikki noticed that Will seemed to have conveniently vanished, probably hiding to escape Rikki now that Zane had shown up.

"Did he?" Rikki took a long sip of her pina colada, trying to keep her poker face on. "And how are you?" She asked politely.

"I'm fine." Zane nodded, a hopeful look on his face. "Listen, can we go talk somewhere?"

"I'm here to watch Bella perform, Zane." Rikki shook her head, turning back to face the stage.

"Coffee, then." Zane ducked back into her line of vision. "Please."

Rikki sighed, crossing her arms tightly over her chest. "Fine." She said eventually.

"How's tomorrow? Noon?" Excitement sparkled in Zane's eyes. "At that little place we used to go to all the time by the pier?"

"No, somewhere else." Rikki quickly cut in. They used to meet at that coffee shop every week for breakfast. There were way too many memories inside that little eatery. "How about the Coffee Bean, downtown?"

"Anywhere." Zane said simply, his tone making it plain that he meant the single word.

"So..." Rikki broke away from his piercing gaze, raising her shoulders at Cleo, who was watching them curiously. "I'll see you tomorrow, then."

"Tomorrow." Zane pulled a small, but worn, date book from his pocket and jotted in a quick note. "I'll see you there." His parting smile had the slightest tinge of sadness to it as he walked away.

Rikki's heart pounded as she watched him go. She couldn't help picturing what could have been, had things not ended up the way they had. She and Zane would be nearing their fourth wedding anniversary by now. Rikki swallowed hard, shaking her head as she looked up at the stage. Will slunk over, an apologetic look on his face.

"I'm really sorry." He winced at the severity of Rikki's expression. "I didn't mean to tell him anything, but he really \_really\_ wanted to see you and I felt bad for him. I \_had \_ to tell him, Rikki."

"William..." Rikki placed a hand on Will's shoulder, causing him to tense up. "I'm not mad."

"You're... not?" Will relaxed marginally, a doubtful expression on his face.

"No, I'm not." Rikki waited a second before giving him a hard swat across the shoulder blades. "But don't let it happen again."

The rest of the night passed by in a blur. The band was well received

by the crowd, earning themselves a huge cheer as they took their final bows.

"You were ah-MAzing." Will swept Bella into his arms, hugging her tightly against his chest.

"I've got to agree with Will." Cleo kissed Lewis on the cheek as he tucked his drum sticks into his back pocket.

Watching her best friends with the men they loved, Rikki couldn't help but shoot a quick glance around the club for Zane, but he seemed to have gone already.

"Ready to head home?" Bella couldn't stop smiling.

"\_Yes\_." Cleo nodded. "This had been way too much fun for one weekend."

"You all go ahead." Rikki picked up her bag and zipped up her light jacket. "I've got to run by the office right quick, but I'll be home soon."

"You sure?" Lewis frowned. "We can walk with you."

"No thanks." Rikki shook her head. "I'll only be a moment, get out of here."

It took a little more convincing, but eventually Rikki's friends were headed home without her. Rikki watched them go, happy couples walking hand in hand. She turned to walk the other direction, but instead of heading for her office she started walking towards the docks.

A few minutes later, Rikki stood at the edge of the water, breathing in the familiar salty air. She took in a long, deep breath, then plunged into the sea. For a few seconds she just drifted, letting the water carry her wherever it pleased. Then she started swimming, as if using her muscles might make her head clear.

When she, Cleo, and Bella had been younger, they'd gone swimming on practically a daily basis. Now that they were all older and working full time jobs they rarely made it out to the moon pool anymore. Late night swims were forgotten in favor of getting to bed early so that they could wake up even earlier. Plus, nowadays they were so focused on keeping the secret, not being discovered, that they rarely got a chance to just enjoy being mermaids. Cleo and Bella had pushed it into their past, but Rikki swam as often as she could manage.

Tonight, Rikki took her time. She swam for a long time before finally heading towards home.

\* \* \*

><p>Rikki could hardly sleep that night, in spite of her relaxing swim. As much as she hated to admit it, she was nervous about seeing Zane again.<p>

Time seemed to fly by, though Rikki desperately wished it would slow down. Before she knew it, she was walking through the swinging door of the Coffee Bean, looking for a boy she'd never thought she'd see

again.

## 6. Reunited

Zane's face brightened immediately as Rikki walked inside the large wooden door.

"Hey." His eyes never left hers as he pulled out a chair behind a small table, gesturing for her to have a seat. "You look... amazing." He said as he took the seat opposite her.

They quickly placed their coffee orders, which arrived a few moments later.

"Thank you." Rikki spoke shyly as she smoothed her green dress over her knees. Her eyes flickered upward to Zane's as she fidgeted, unsure of just what to say next. "So..." She stalled. "How have you been?"

"Fine." Zane nodded, folding his hands on the table top. "But I'm better now that I'm here with you. You haven't answered any of my calls."

"Yeah, I'm sorry about that." Rikki flushed guiltily. "I've been really busy."

"For four years?" The hurt was visible in Zane's eyes. "You haven't taken my phone calls in four years, Rikki."

"I'm sorry." Rikki said defensively. "I just... \_couldn't, \_ok?"

"Ok." Zane's face softened into a faint smile. "I'm just glad you're here now."

Rikki deflated. She'd been ready to launch into a long and well thought out defence for why she hadn't been able to talk to him, but he seemed happy to move on from the subject, so she was just as please to drop it.

"So..." Rikki knew what she wanted to ask him, what she needed to ask him, but she didn't quite have the nerve to ask it. "Are you working?" She finished lamely.

Zane nodded. "I am, yes. I work for my father as his personal assistant."

"Oh?" Rikki raised an eyebrow, surprised.

"I know." Zane shrugged sheepishly. "It's not what I expected to end up doing either, but my dad is training me to be the vice president of his real estate development firm, so that he can go back to focusing on medicine. It's a pretty great deal."

"Good, I'm glad to hear it." Rikki processed what he'd said, trying to keep her face neutral. She couldn't believe that after all of his protests that he wouldn't be caught dead accepting work from his father, that's exactly what he had ended up doing.

"And you're working at that event planning business. The one on Mill Street." Zane spoke, his tone clear that he wasn't asking a question.

Rikki frowned. "Yes... I am." She spoke hesitantly. "How did you know that?"

"Don't worry, I'm not stalking you or anything." Zane said with an easy laugh. "You planned a wedding a few months ago for a couple I know from work, Tom and Lynn Johnson? They were really pleased with your work, they told the whole office about what a wonderful reception you planned."

"Oh." Rikki relaxed slightly. "I remember them. That was a fun one to work on."

The pair sipped on their coffee as an awkward silence settled down on the table. They were clearly both working out what to say next.

Rikki swallowed, running through her thoughts in her head. She couldn't wait any longer, she knew she'd never be able to relax with Zane if she didn't ask.

"How's your memory?" She asked bluntly, nervously watching for Zane's reaction.

Zane didn't look the least bit surprised by her question. In fact, he looked as if he'd been waiting all along for her to say those words. "I haven't had a flicker in years." He said lightly, absently fingering the pages of his date book as he smiled at her.

"Really?" Against her better judgement, Rikki felt a flicker of hope.

"Really." Zane's eyes were warm as they gazed on her. "My doctors say I'm completely recovered."

"Wow, Zane." Rikki rubbed a hand at the back of her neck as she stirred her coffee. "That's huge."

"I know it is." Zane reached for her hand, taking it in his. He gently rubbed his thumb over her knuckles. "Listen, Rikki..." There was a twinkle in his eye. "Let me take you to dinner tonight."

"I don't know, Zane." Rikki said hesitantly.

"Wait." Zane held up a hand, stopping her. "Rikki, you are all I've been able to think about over the years. It's always been you. I think about you every day. I wonder how you've been, if you've fallen in love with someone else." He paused, his eyes dropping down to the table. "I wonder if you've forgotten about me."

"Zane..." Rikki felt herself melting at his words. Slowly, she leaned across the table and pressed her lips onto Zane's. She sat back a few seconds later, her cheeks flushing a deep pink color.

"Wow..." Zane couldn't suppress a huge smile as he looked at her.

"Pick me up tonight at 7:30 for dinner." Rikki winked.

\* \* \*

><p>"You're going to dinner with <em>Zane<em> tonight?" Cleo cried in disbelief.

"I know, I know." Rikki threw her hands in the air as she dropped onto the couch, sitting next to her friend. "But I have a really good feeling about it."

"I knew you two were patching things up at the club last night." Cleo squealed. "He couldn't take his eyes off of you."

"Yeah, well." Rikki shrugged. "It's only dinner. You never know, we may not have anything in common anymore."

"I doubt that." Bella called from the kitchen. "You and Zane are endgame, Rik. I've been saying that for years."

"It's just dinner." Rikki laughed. "It's not that big a deal."

Cleo and Bella shared a long look that plainly said that they thought this dinner was, in fact, a big deal after all.

A few hours later, Rikki was putting the finishing touches on her hair, which she had carefully pinned up off of her face.

"You look absolutely gorgeous." Cleo assured her. "Just breathe."

And breathe she did. Rikki took in one last long deep breath after another, calming herself down all the way until the doorbell rang.

"That's him!" Bella clapped her hands excitedly.

"Honestly, Bells." Rikki muttered as she put in her second earring. "It's just Zane."

"You two have fun." Cleo said gently as she passed Rikki her keys. "Whatever happens, happens."

"Thanks." Rikki smiled gratefully at her friend before pulling open the front door.

Rikki couldn't deny it, Zane looked amazing. He was wearing a simple white button up shirt with black slacks, but he made the simple outfit look like million bucks.

"Hello." He said timidly, holding out a bouquet of roses. "These are for you."

"They're absolutely gorgeous." Bella swooped in, snatching the flowers and skipping them into the kitchen.

"Thanks." Rikki shot Bella a look as she stepped outside.

Dinner was wonderful. Zane took Rikki to a little Italian place

they'd never been to before. It was quiet, with dim lighting. The two passed conversation easily back and forth over the next couple hours. Rikki was surprised at how easily she fell back into habit with him, it was almost as if they'd never spent any time apart. This Zane was exactly the same Zane she remembered.

They talked and talked, passing another hour easily. Eventually dinner had come and gone, along with dessert and coffee.

As many times as Rikki reminded herself that she and Zane had spent four years apart, it was all too easy to fall right back in love with him.

The pair walked, hand in hand, up to Rikki's front door. They slowed as they reached it, neither of them wanting the evening to end.

"So..." Zane paused, holding Rikki's hands tightly in his. He looked down at his shoes as he spoke. "I know things are... different... now. We're older. We've got a lot to catch up on. But..." His gaze shifted, his eyes looking deep into Rikki's. "What if we just picked up where we left off four years ago?"

"You mean..." Rikki swallowed. "You and me, back together?"

"You and me. Back together." Zane nodded.

"Ok." Rikki couldn't believe how quickly the answer had flown out of her mouth. She should be taking her time to think through things through, weigh the pros and cons, but all she wanted to do was kiss Zane. Kiss her boyfriend.

And she did, and she did.

\* \* \*

><p>Rikki woke up the next morning feeling as if nothing could ruin her mood. She bounced happily down the steps, eager to tell Cleo and Bella all about the night before.<p>

It all felt too good to be true, like a dream she might wake up from at any second.

Bella looked up from her cereal as Rikki walked up to the table, a grin playing at the corners of her mouth. "Someone didn't get in until awfully late last night." She said mischievously. "I'm guessing the night went well?"

"Well... Actually..." Rikki pulled out the chair opposite Bella's. "I have news. Now, you might be surprised, but-"

"You're up!" Cleo shrieked happily as she hurried down the steps. She dashed to the table, almost knocking over the chair she was trying to sit in. "I want to hear everything." She gushed, leaning forward on her elbows.

"Well, I was actually just getting ready to tell Bella." Rikki took in a deep breath.

"She didn't get in until late, like almost one AM." Bella shot in, "I

heard the front door open and close."

"Really?" Cleo interrupted, giggling to Bella. "I knew things were going to go well."

"Hey, guys?" Rikki spoke up from her place at the table. "I do have something to tell you, and it's pretty big."

"Hey Rik. How did it go last night?" Lewis asked as he jogged down the steps, towelling his hair dry as he reached the table. "How's Zane been?" He sat in the kitchen chair next to Cleo.

"Apparently last night went really \_really\_ well." Cleo said excitedly.

"Yeah, Rikki got home really late." Bella shot in.

"Bella heard the front door at one AM." Cleo finished.

"No kidding?" Lewis peeled a banana, sounding just as gossipy as the girls. His eyes landed on Rikki's. "So you two hit it off, huh?" He spoke through a mouthful of half chewed banana.

"Yeah, Rikki." Bella interrupted. "When are you going to see him again?"

"You two made plans, didn't you?" Cleo cut in.

Cleo, Bella, and Lewis dissolved into a chattering mess of excited gossip as yet another person walked down the steps.

Silence fell upon the table as they each looked up, surprise clear on each of their faces.

"Hey guys." Zane gave a sheepish wave before shoving his hand into the pocket of the same black slacks he'd worn the night before.

Rikki stood, walking over to her boyfriend and taking his hands in hers. She turned to face the table. "Like I've been trying to tell you guys... Zane and I are back together"

She smiled as their cheers washed over her.

End  
file.